

CALL FOR PAPERS

Mary E. Wilkins Freeman Society
American Literature Association 35th Annual Conference
May 23-26, 2024
The Palmer House Hilton
17 East Monroe Street
Chicago, IL 60603

“I’ve seen enough of haunted houses to last me as long as I live”: Mary E. Wilkins Freeman and the Supernatural.

In 1903, Mary Eleanor Wilkins Freeman published *The Wind in the Rose-Bush, and Other Stories of the Supernatural*, a collection of ghost stories which offer a darker picture of New England through tales that have since become canonic, such as “Luella Miller,” “The Southwest Chamber,” and “The Lost Ghost.” Another posthumous collection of ghost stories was published in 1974, marking a new interest in Freeman’s uncanny tales and adding to Freeman’s oeuvre, with stories such as “The Hall Bedroom” and the orientalist “The Jade Bracelet” collected for the first time. Many critics have explored what Jeffrey Weinstock calls in *Scare Tactics* the “spectral sisterhood” of 19th through early 20th century women writers who used the supernatural to subvert the ideology of the “true woman.” Twentieth-century criticism of Freeman’s ghost stories focused on the feminist messages concealed within the writing (see Marjorie Pryse, Mary R. Reichardt, Leah Blatt Glasser). In more recent criticism, Myrto Drizou has traced the figure of La Llorona in Freeman’s “Old Woman Magoun,”¹ while Audrey Fogels has outlined how infanticide and domestic violence might be brought to light through the symbolic specter.² Freeman’s interest in the supernatural extended beyond the figure of the ghost. In 1892 Freeman published *The Pot of Gold*, a collection of short stories for children containing fairy-tale and folklore characters, and her poetry collection from 1897 features fairies and enchanted places, with James Bucky Carter calling for a re-reading of gender in Freeman’s fairy tales.³ Short stories that would not be considered conventional ghost stories or fairy tales also contain supernatural figures, with witches, fairies, and spectral apparitions popping up unexpectedly in stories such as “The Prism,” and “Cinnamon Roses.”

Is it time to agree with Mrs. Meserve in “The Lost Ghost” (1903) who declares: “I’ve seen enough of haunted houses to last me as long as I live”? Or might new readings of the supernatural in Freeman offer exciting new avenues of research in contemporary criticism of the writer?

The Mary E. Wilkins Freeman Society invites abstracts (of no more than 250 words) for presentations at the annual conference of the American Literature Association (<http://americanliteratureassociation.org/>).

Possible paper topics include, but are not limited to:

- New or expanded approaches to Freeman's ghost stories
- The Gothic and haunted houses in Freeman's work
- Depictions of Spiritualism
- Fairies, giants, and other monsters in Freeman's writing for children
- Queer and LGBTQIA+ re-readings of Freeman's ghosts
- Witchcraft and folklore
- Spectrality and the Uncanny
- Freeman's depiction of Trauma and current themes in Trauma Studies
- Freeman in relation to the "spectral sisterhood" of Gothic women writers then and now
- Freeman's Ghostly Spinsters, Mothers, and Children



Please send abstracts or proposals to H.J.E. Champion (hjchampion@live.co.uk) and Leah Blatt Glasser (lglasser@mtholyoke.edu) no later than January 14, 2024.

We will also consider a limited number of panel proposals (of no more than 500 words) on other topics, for a second author panel.

We encourage you to join the society by the time of the conference. Registration is free.

Information about the Society can be found at the Mary E. Wilkins Freeman Society website: <https://wilkinsfreemansociety.wordpress.com/>

¹ Myrto Drizou, "Transatlantic Lloronas: Infanticide and Gender in Mary E. Wilkins Freeman and Alexandros Papadiamantis," *Reading with and against the Grain : New Perspectives on Mary E. Wilkins Freeman*, edited by M. Drizou, S. Palmer, C. Roudeau, Edinburgh University Press, 2023.

² Audrey Fogels, "'Strange Sightings and Sounds': Indirection and the Rhetoric of the Feminine in Mary E. Wilkins Freeman's Tales (1852-1930)," *Transatlantica* [Online], 1, 2012.

³ James Bucky Carter. "Princes, Beasts, or Royal Pains: Men and Masculinity in the Revisionist Fairy Tales of Mary E. Wilkins Freeman." *Marvels & Tales*, vol. 20, no. 1, 2006, pp. 30-46. *JSTOR*, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/41388774>. Accessed 26 Nov. 2023.